

The Place of Nam in Sikhism.

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I

Sikhism is a pragmatic religion. It was founded by ten divine teachers—Satgurus—in the Punjab during the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. Guru Nanak, the first of these religious preceptors, was born near Lahore in 1469 and the last of them, Guru Gobind Singh, died at Nander in Hyderabad, Deccan, in 1708.

The Sikh Gurus were men with a mission. They had achieved union with God and they were anxious to show the way to the Abode of God—*Such Khand*—to others. For nearly two centuries, by personal example and by preaching—particularly through *Gurubāni*—they helped a large number of persons to follow the path of true religion; and when their teachings had become crystallized and the Sikh way to self-realization or salvation had become well-established, they made the Word (*Bāni*) the Guru and ended the remarkable line of personal Guruship.

II

When Guru Nanak was born, religion had been reduced to a mere matter of form and religious observances aimed more at external purity and at conduct in conformity with conventional ideas than at the attainment of inner perfection or the development of the soul. Symbols had lost their meaning and value and the religious practices—“*Karam, Dharam, Kiriya*”, *Pooja, Path, Hom, Jug, Barat, Tirathjatra* and search for God in jungles had often the effect of taking man away from God and of emphasizing the Ego (*Homāi*) in him. As Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru puts, it:—

*“Even if his desire is fulfilled and he dies
at a place of pilgrimage,*

*Even then Pride does not leave his soul;
He may cleanse his body day and night,
But how can the dirt of the mind be
washed away by the cleansing of the body?
All efforts to perfect and control the body
Can never prevent the mind from being
under the influence of Māyā;
To wash the destructible body again and
again
Is like washing the mud wall: how can it
become clean?”*

The Sikh Gurus pointed out to the people that they were following a wrong path—their so-called religion was leading them astray,—away from God and not towards Him. After all, what was the main object of man's coming into the world?—not the development of the Ego (*Homāi*) but the perfection of the soul, the removal of the difference between *Jivātmā* and *Paramatma—abhedhiā* of the human soul and the Divine Spirit.

The Sikh Gurus regard human birth as a rare privilege, which one should not expect to get again and again—it is a priceless opportunity to meet God. As Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, put it:—

*“It is your fortune to have obtained human
body or birth,
This is your one chance to secure union
with God;
All other efforts (actions) will not avail
thee,
The only way is to worship NAM in the
company of saints.”*

According to the Sikh Gurus, NAM is the one medicine—there is nothing else to equal its potency—for all ills of the soul. NAM is the soap that alone can wash away the accumulated dirt of sins, of not only one life but of myriads

of lives. Says the third divine teacher, Guru Amar Das:—

"This mind has received coating after coating of dirt, in one life after another and has become jet black, Like the oily, dirty dhoti which has been used for ages to wipe the oil and dirt from the Kohlu or the wooden oil-press and which no amount of washing can make clean—"

Even when such a dark stage is reached, there is still one remedy possible. Says Guru Nanak:—

"It can again become as clear as a crystal if he meets a true divine teacher Who gives him the nectar of NAM and an inner illumination, Nanak."

Guru Nanak has put the same thing in simpler language in the *Japji*, the *Gitā* of the Sikhs:—

*"When hands and feet get besmeared, the dirt is removed by washing them with water;
When the clothes become soiled with urine they are cleansed with soap;
When the mind becomes impure with sin it is purified with NAM."*

The Sikh Gurus' sole prescription for ending the pain of *Āwā-gawan* and securing the bliss of a permanent union with God for all human beings, irrespective of creed, caste, sect or sex, is NAM. As the fifth divine teacher, Guru Arjan, has stated in his famous composition, *SUKHMANI*:—

*"There is naught else equal to NAM,
Nanak, man gains deliverance only through
Jap of NAM.
.....
Indeed, the excellence of NAM is very great,
Through NAM many sinners (fallen ones)
have achieved salvation."*

Says Guru Nanak:—

"The medicine for all ailments is NAM."

Such is the supreme importance attached to NAM in Sikhism. NAM is

everything to a Sikh—without NAM all other actions are in vain—they are like the decking (Shingār) of a dead body or the wealth of a miser—utterly futile.

III

But what exactly is meant by NAM by the Gurus? Is it a sort of incantation, a *mantra* or a magical word? Is it only one of the countless names of God or one of His attributes? No, NAM is neither a *mantra* nor one of the names of God nor a magical word or talisman. NAM is used by the Sikh Gurus to describe a particular *Swarūp* of the Formless One—His All-Pervading nature. God in His quality of an All-Pervading (*Sarab-Viyāpak*). Spirit looking after His creatures and creation (*Sarab-Pritpālak*) is NAM; and the supreme duty of man, the sole purpose of his sojourn into the world, is to realize NAM or God in this particular *Swarūp* or manifestation. How can this be achieved? Not by renouncing the world and going in search of NAM to places of pilgrimage or to the jungles. Because, says the Guru:—NAM is everywhere. "Why go elsewhere, when He is here?" Why go against His Will and leave the world when He has himself sent you into the world? Is it not moral cowardice to escape your responsibilities and duties? No, the Sikh Gurus expect every man to lead a natural and normal life in the world, to fulfil his worldly duties—his duties to his family, to his neighbours, to his community, to his country and humanity, and yet accomplish the main purpose for which he has come into the world—the realization of NAM. In his conversations with the Sidhas, Guru Nanak laid particular stress on the necessity of living in the world and fulfilling the worldly duties and on the perfect feasibility of combining a life of a good *Grihasta* with the life of a true *Sādhu*. Says the Guru:—

"Just as the lotus and the duck live in water—unattached and unaffected by the water,
Says Nanak, man can cross the Bhav-sagar and reach God by fixing his mind on the Shabaā—the Divine Word;
When the One God dwells in the mind, he lives in real isolation—doing and wishing, he is yet without Āshā or expectation of reward.
He sees the All-pervading Spirit and shows Him to others—Nanak is a slave unto Him."

IV

According to the Sikh Gurus, the difficulties in the way of self-realization or the realization of NAM are not the family life and the so-called worldly activities or the performance of his duties as a citizen, but they lie in his arrogating to himself all powers, and, in his *homai* or egoism, not assessing worldly pleasures and enjoyments at their true value and in becoming absorbed in them and in loving them as they were the ultimate reality, forgetting the Reality behind them, who is their Creator. Man is blinded by Egoism, by his love of *Māyā* (*Māyā-Mamā*) and cannot see within and recognize NAM. Says Guru Ram Das, the fourth Guru:—

"*Jivātmā* and *Parmātmā* live together—
but between them is the strong wall of the Ego;
Perfect Guru pulls down the Ego wall,
Nanak, and the man meets his Maker."

The ninth divine teacher, Guru Teg Bahadur, has beautifully expressed the relationship between *Jiv-ātmā* and *Parmātmā* and has pointed out where and how to find God. He says:—

"Why go to the jungle in search of Him?
He is everywhere, ever-present, He is living with you.
Just as the smell resides within the flower
and ashes are contained within the charcoal,

In the same way God lives within you—
O brother, search for him within.
Both without and within He is the same—
this is the knowledge given to me by the Guru;
Saith Nanak, without knowing the Self
(*Āpā-Chināi*) it is not possible to get rid of doubt or duality."

NAM is within, God is within; but the Ego (*Homai*) has blinded the soul and has separated it from NAM. Says Guru Arjan:—

"When the Ego disappears, then there is all happiness and both the mind and body are restored to health;
Nanak, then I see Him and find how praiseworthy He is."

But how can the Ego (*Homai*) leave the mind and restore it to health so that it may get the vision of NAM or God? Says Guru Amar Das:—

"Nanak, Ego left me through a meeting with Satguru,
And then the mind realized the Truth within."

V

The Sikhs believe that the killing of the Ego, the control of the mind, the realization of NAM cannot be achieved without the help of Satguru, a true teacher. Guru Arjan has put this in a novel way. He says:—

"He, whose Abode it is, has locked it and has entrusted the key to the Guru;
It cannot be had without going to the Satguru, no matter how hard one may otherwise try."

The Sikh Gurus are very definite—the realization of NAM cannot be achieved without the guidance of the Satguru. Says Guru Nanak:—

"Without the Satguru no one has ever realized Him nor can realize Him,
.....
Those who, by meeting the Satguru, give up *Māyā-Moh*, they receive salvation for all time."

Man, unaided, cannot get out of the clutches of *Homār* and *Māyā*. His mind, which has been darkened by the clouds of pride, cannot be illumined except through the word of the *Satguru*. As a matter of fact, the Sikh Gurus have stated again and again that the real *Satguru* is not a person but *Gurubāni*—the words of one who is in tune with the Infinite. The realization of NAM comes through *Gurubāni*—through hearing it, through singing and reciting it, through its *Jaṭ*, through its meditation and *poojā*, through its understanding and through ordering your life in accordance with it. Man learns to value and love *Guru-bāni* through association with *Sādhus*, through *Satsangat*, where nothing else is talked of except NAM, where only the praises of the Lord are sung, where *Hari-Kirtan* is going on, where *Gurubāni* is recited and where nothing else is worshipped except NAM. The Sikh religion does not believe in a purely personal or individual religion. True religion and true religious life are learnt in the congregation of saints. According to the Sikh Gurus, he alone is a saint or *Sādhu*, “who does not forget the Name of God even for one single breath”—because who knows whether the breath that has gone in will come out again or not.

It is not an easy thing to drive out the Ego or to control the mind so that it may not wander in lust, anger, greed, love of the unreal things and pride—the five arch-enemies of the soul. It is with constant repetition of *Gurubāni* with countless *Jaṭ* of NAM, with daily meditation and *pooja* that the mind is slowly disciplined and man learns to act according to the Divine Will—and the way is prepared for the realization of NAM.

It must have become clear from what has been said above that there

are two stages of *Nam-simran* and NAM-realization. It is through the *Jaṭ* and *Simran* of NAM that the realization of NAM is achieved. The process is a long one—it is a difficult thing to do real *Jaṭ* of NAM. As the third Guru has put it:—

*“Everyone mutters Ram, Ram, but by
muttering Ram does not become real;
It is through the Guru's Favour that Ram
is grasped by the mind and the Jaṭ can
bear fruit.”*

It is only when *Jaṭ* is done, not only by the tongue but through the mind and actions, that the *Jaṭ* is of any real value. As Guru Arjan beautifully expresses it:—

*“The person who speaks Hari with the mouth
as well as with mind and body,
Ye will find him always happy.”*

And again:—

*“The person who meditates upon God with
mind, words and deeds (man-bach-karam),
He shall get the full fruits of his labours.”*

On the other hand, says Guru Ram Das:—

*“The person who repeats Hari, Hari, but
lives a life of ill-will, his mind does not
become pure;
He may do daily all kinds of actions, but
he cannot enjoy real happiness even in a
dream.”*

It is, therefore, only when the *Jaṭ* is done with the mind and *Karam*, that realization of NAM can come. When that stage is reached, the whole nature of man changes and his will becomes attuned to the will of God. The mind ceases to wander after *Māyā* and the control of the Ego disappears—the wall of Ego collapses and the mind is finally liberated. Says Guru Arjan:—

*“The egg of superstition has burst and
the mind has become illumined,
The Guru has cut off the chains from the
feet and has freed my soul.”*

When the wall of the Ego falls, as the fourth Guru had put it, the union between the *Jiv-ātmā* and *Parmātmā* becomes complete and the man achieves his salvation—

"Just as water meets water and becomes one, so the soul unites with the soul; Āwā-gawan ends and the soul finds its permanent resting-place. Nanak, I am sacrifice unto Thee, O Lord."

VI

This last stage, however, is only reached if man learns the supreme lesson that nothing is achieved in this world except through Divine Grace. He meets the *Satguru* through Divine favour; He realizes the meaning and value of *Gurubāni* through His kindness or *Dayā*; He achieves the realization of NAM through divine Grace. Says Guru Arjan:—

"Realization comes neither through effort nor through service, but unsought and unwished for—

Nanak, those alone worship Gurubāni on whom the Lord bestows His favour."

This does not mean that one can realize NAM without effort. A long life of discipline and devotion is necessary to pull down the wall of *Homai* and to illumine the mind—even after that stage is reached, activity does not end. A new life of *par-uphār* begins. But if man begins to believe that he has achieved realization through his own efforts, he is in danger of losing all that he has laboriously gained—the wall of Ego again rises and separates the *Ātmā* from the All-Pervading spirit and the soul falls again an easy prey to its enemies—*Kām, Karodh, Lobh, Moh, Ahankār*; and it has again to go through the painful process of deaths and rebirths, from which he was about to be freed for ever,

*"The man who slides back from the last stage,
He has again to wander through the circle
of deaths and rebirths."*

It is for this reason that the Sikh Gurus lay very great emphasis on the doctrine of Divine Grace. It is also on this account that Guru Nanak places before man again and again the example of the woman in love, who unmindful of what people say throws herself at the mercy of her beloved and offers herself as a sacrifice unto him. In love she loses all sense of pride and shame and she is prepared to do the meanest service for her beloved. She spends her days and nights in thinking out ways and means of pleasing him and winning his love. He may treat her cavalierly or cruelly, but she sticks to him; she would rather die in his service, even at his hands—but she will not leave him. If she succeeds in winning his love and tasting the joy of union with him, she regards it a great favour. As Guru Nanak puts it:—

"What other merit have I, except that I have been found pleasing to Thee, O Lord."

Guru Nanak expects from the man who seeks to win Divine Favour the same self-surrender and sacrifice, the same tenacity of purpose and perseverance, the same devotion and steadfastness, the same spirit of service and humility, the same readiness to die in pursuit of His love and the joy of union with Him. Guru Nanak again and again urges man to emulate the wonderful example of the woman in love. He says:—

"Love God as the woman loves her man."

And the tenth Guru has put it:—

"Those alone realize God who love Him."

VII

To conclude, man comes into the world to end the painful circle of

deaths and rebirths and to meet his Maker. According to the Sikh Gurus, this can be achieved only through NAM-SIMRAN, HARI-KIRTAN and PREMA-BHAGTI.

"Says Nanak, the essence of all teachings is that without Hari-Bhagti man receives no quarter; There have been Rāmas, Krishnas and Rasuls, but no one received acceptance (Prāpati) without Bhagti."

There is still time for you, O man. Realize your good fortune. This human birth is a rare privilege. Begin to associate with Sādhus and move in Satsangat—learn to understand Gurubāni and worship NAM and engage day and night, every moment of your life, in NAM-SIMRAN and BHAGTI. Do not

delay, because Guru Nanak has stated an abiding truth:—

"We are men of one breath only—I know not a longer time-limit; Who knows whether the breath that has gone in will come out again or not."

The warning issued by Guru Arjan is still graver. He says:—

"It is with great luck that one obtaineth Manikkhā dehi (human body), The man who does not engage in Jaṭ of NAM is the killer of his soul (Ātam-Ghāti)."

The Satguru is the giver of life, who teaches man Prema Bhagti, the food of the soul, and who helps him to attain salvation.

SAT SRI AKAL.
